

# This is what I said about the future of news in 2009 – you fools, why didn't you listen??!

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*This week I am hosting a workshop with some Swedish newspaper editors, so I thought I would go back to a talk I gave in Stockholm in 2009 to see whether they should bother listening to my predictions for their business in 2016. Here are the rough notes I made for that talk. Judge for yourself. On some of it I was too optimistic but the more brutal truths have certainly come about. You [can see my slides in which I give an analysis of current state of UK newspapers and make new predictions for the future of news.](#)*



Lady Gaga: big in 2009

Thank you for inviting me to speak about the Next five years – as soon as Torbjorn said that was the suggested title I immediately thought of a song by David Bowie about the end of the world called Five Years – of course, if the talk was about the last five years then perhaps I would have chosen another song by the Beatles – Yesterday – all my troubles seemed so far away – but as it's late in the day and you need waking up – here's a [burst of Bowie](#)



Five years, that's all we've got. Well journalism survived even if David didn't...

I like that song because it paints a portrait of a modern world where we are over-loaded with data – where mainstream media is how we live our lives – where ‘so many people’ are ignored – and the world is heading for catastrophe.

Of course back then in 1972 no-one had heard of global warming – it is just one of the many problems that the world faces and that we hope journalism can play a part in solving.

News media is now itself environmental – it is part of every aspect of our lives. But if journalism is to survive and thrive then it will do so by learning to love the public and work with them.

So what's your problem? your media looks healthy with fine journalism, balanced coverage and good international information. You have an educated, wealthy public. People need journalism more than ever to help interpret their media rich lives – and the demand for it is stronger than ever.

So why when we look forward five years are we so worried? My book [\*SuperMedia: Saving Journalism So It Can Save The World\*](#) (Blackwell) published in 2008 recognised three possibly contradictory facts.

1. Journalism has never been more plentiful and of such as high quality – there is more good quality information, analysis and debate than ever before. It's never been easier or cheaper to make good journalism – sales of quality like the Economist, Wall Street Journal are up – the BBC now has global reach for its public service international journalism online – even the liberal niche British broadsheet The Guardian has found 10 million online readers outside the UK. Across the world there are booming sales of newspapers and TV channels are being launched daily.
2. New technologies are delivering opportunities for journalism. I have more processing and broadcasting power in my iPhone than I had with a whole newsroom from 10 years ago. And the public want to help make news media even more plentiful and productive – and they will do it for free.
3. The same forces that offer these opportunities are also threatening the business model for mainstream media. More than that they are changing the very nature of news production and even news itself. So whatever news media survives will not be the same as before:

Now this is why we in mainstream media should all be worried.

“The social media revolution...is all about the separation of information from its means of distribution” [David Campbell]

It's a boring quote but what it says is dramatic. It underpins everything else we are going to talk about. The news industry monopoly over news is broken. The platform is no longer the prison of information. All our old methods of distribution are threatened. In the book I argue that we have five years- perhaps ten – to 'save' journalism.

In this talk I am going to try to put what is happening in a conceptual framework but with some examples of what works and why.

Then I am going to look at what that means for the way that journalists work and how they are trained – if they want to survive.

This is why there is a crisis for journalism.

The news industry monopoly over news is broken. All our old methods of distribution are threatened.

There is an obvious economic problem for mainstream media across the world – yes parts of the world are seeing increased newspaper sales, radio is booming, TV is booming across much of the globe and is holding up in the West – but everywhere the business model is in crisis as consumer behaviour changes and the Internet takes money away without providing ways to monetise online MSM

The audience is changing in its behaviour – becoming multi functional – altered habits – it is finding the information it wants and ignoring the rest – it is exercising choice and sometimes that means not choosing mainstream news.

We are doing research on digital natives which shows how behaviour is changing but in unexpected way – there are already myths emerging which need to be critiqued with real research that goes beyond the simple numbers and anecdotes.

This is a major threat to the idea of public service value – by this I mean the value we put on the role of journalism – in the private or public sector – its usefulness as a form of information as well as entertainment.

And it is a challenge to people's trust in MSM – the bias, distortion, limitations, and selfishness of MSM is being exposed by competition from other sources – and our claim to 'quality' is being undermined in the same way and we are being exposed as often superficial, formulaic, repetitive and predictable with a narrow agenda and little creativity.

There are two principle characteristics of the emerging new journalisms:

- Public participation: bloggers, online video, file-sharing, user-generated content, but also crowd-sourcing. The citizen is now involved in the production of news at every stage. They can work with professional journalists or they can do it by themselves.
- Connectivity: everything is hyperlinked, people can share, distribute, get information directly, business or government can communicate directly with citizens who can connect with each other. So instead of linear dissemination we have complex networks and interlinked data flows.

These two factors are changing the production, consumption and indeed the very nature of news itself in profound ways. Together they show we are moving towards what I call *Networked Journalism*.

Here are two quick examples – I could talk about Iran or Obama but I want to take two more routine but possibly more radical examples because they are rooted in everyday experience of news journalism:

**BBC Snow:** Last April there was a massive and unexpected snowfall in southern England that brought the country to a halt. The mainstream news said it was a disaster for the country and that we would lose £2 billion in lost production. Meanwhile, the BBC were being sent photos and video by ordinary people of their experience of the day. 60,000 people sent in material for free that told a different story. It told a story about a once in a lifetime day when families went and played together in the snow instead of going to work or school. So people made the news themselves but chose to tell the story through the mainstream broadcaster. It shows how citizens are shaping agendas in a networked way.

**Netmums** – set up by two women – run by volunteers – information on nursery schools, nappies, and recipes – but it has 500,000 members – and its forums provide a rich source of community, opinion, identity, debate and information – all the things that MSM was supposed to do but failed. Why isn't MSM connecting to these people? Because it spoke at them rather than with them. It was not relevant to their lives. It was not where they were at and it did not give them the space and the control over the mediation of their lives. Netmums does.

We are seeing a shift in journalism from:

Product to Process

Manufacturing to Service Industry

Fortress to Network

this means we will be doing a different kind of journalism – not just different platforms

Predictions:

MSM when networked will be more valued by the public

Specialised media will be more valued – eg finance sport etc

'Public service' sector will sustain – and is actually growing in the US

Independent online media will grow – eg hyperlocal appears to be taking off in the UK – but it will not replace MSM because MSM will become more networked – the two will become symbiotic

In a sense all organisations with a public role are becoming media organisations. Government, business, NGOs, unions and the rest can all now communicate directly with the citizen and act as a forum, watchdog and reporter. They become networked journalists.

50% of current jobs will go – there were far too many journalists considering the efficiency implications of new media technology – but possibly the equivalent of 50% more jobs will be created elsewhere as societies chose to invest in NJ. We should spend the money on the new jobs not on protecting the old ones – which is why I am opposed to subsidies and protection for Old Media.

which brings us to how the journalist should be prepared for this brave but very difficult and complex new world.

Firstly I have to say that media literacy should be for everyone. One of the best things for journalism would be if the public is given the skills and understanding to participate in networked journalism – everything from learning how to set up a blog to thinking about ideas such as objectivity or transparency.

Then think about building journalism skills as career long – but also as conceptual – it's not enough to know how to do journalism – we all have to learn to think about what journalism IS and what it CAN BE – so critical creative thinking as well as skills

Of course we do have to be new media literate – do we have a variety of online skills? not all of them, but a range? and do we understand things like why it is a good idea to moderate comments but also to respond to people who do comment?

Here's a key thought. In a world where people have instant and easy access to your rival's work – what are you adding? are you just creating Churnalism – as Nick Davies call it – or journalism?

When you create your journalism – why is it of use to the consumer? are you providing it in a way that they can re-use and add to or link to or pass on?

And to that end, how connected are you to your audience? are you in the same social networks they use? are you listening to what interests them? what systems do you and your organisation have in place to gather this information? This is not just good marketing, it's newsgathering.

How relevant are you to the consumer? By that I don't just mean that you should only produce what they find useful in their lives. What I mean is how good are you at matching your output to their interests? Do you ask your public what interests them? Do you measure their response? Do you work hard enough to make your product of relevance?

And finally, how editorially diverse are you? Your public is very diverse in its ethnicity, identity, interests, emotions etc. Take the local paper – how can that represent a community which is so connected to different places, activities. I live in Camden where my children go to school and I eat and drink and play football. I work in central London but my football team is in East London, my wife is from West London I have relatives in Bolivia and Germany and I am interested in archeology and Scandinavian literature. What's my most relevant media and can you provide it?

It's only when we have started to answer some of those questions that we can start to talk about pay-walls or public subsidies. First we must show the public that we understand that our role as journalists has changed from gatekeepers to networkers and that we can provide the traditional functions of reporting, analysis, commentary and entertainment – then when we have saved journalism perhaps the world will save us.

When you look back five years you realise how much has changed and how much might change in the next five years. But that will not be the end of it. You must now prepare for permanent impermanence.

Just when you get used to Twitter, for example, you may find that it is replaced or supplemented by something new. Downs Law and Moore's Law show no sign of slowing down. So by the end of the next five years you will face a new landscape – possibly more geologically different even than the new environment we face ourselves in now.

In some shape there will emerge a more semantic web that understands what you want from the Internet and seeks to provide it – so it threatens to disintermediate the editorial function entirely.

At the very least we can expect much more intelligent search so that the consumer can access information that they didn't even realise they wanted.

We will be able to tap into the power of connected online data and networks – but the Internet will be so vast that we

will increasingly operate in separate clouds within that internet sphere – this has profound implications for the role of news media organisations as they shift from institutions to networks to clouds.

So my final prediction is quite simply this. We don't know what is going to happen next. All we can do is try much harder to understand and act upon change as it happens. I hope this talk has contributed to that process and I look forward to hearing from you about how you think we can save journalism so it can save the world.

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